The MASCOT *of* SWEET BRIAR GULCH

HENRY·WALLACE·PHILLIPS

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THE MASCOT OF SWEET BRIAR GULCH

The Mascot of Sweet Briar Gulch

By

Henry Wallace Phillips

Author of Red Saunders
Plain Mary Smith
etc.

With Illustrations by

F. Graham Cootes

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THE gulch ran in a trough of beauty to the foot of Jones's Hill, which rose in a sweeping curve into the clouds.

Wild flowers, trees in profuse leaf, and mats of vines covered the scarred earth, and the sky was as limpid as spring water; the air carried a weight of heart-stirring odors, yet Jim Felton, sitting on the door-step of his cabin in the brilliant sunshine, was not a happy man.

He looked at the hollow of the gulch and cursed it manfully and bitterly. The gold should be there—Jim had figured it all out. The old wash cut at right angles to the creek, and at the turn was where its freight of yellow metal should have been deposited, but when you got down to the bed-rock, the blasted stuff was either slanted so nothing could stay on it, or was rotten—crumbling in your fingers, and that kind of bed will hold nothing.

Therefore Jim had sunk about fifty prospect holes; got colors under the grass-roots, as evidence that pay should be there—and nothing but ashy wash beneath it.

SWEET BRIAR GULCH

When a man is alone, and thinks things are wrong, optimism comes down on the run, the shades of pessimism gather fast and furious—more especially if a man does his own cooking, and the raw material is limited, at that.

The sun had not moved the shadows three inches before Jim had reached the conclusion that this world was all a practical joke, of so low an order that no sensible man would even laugh at it, and he drew a letter from his pocket in proof thereof. It was a thin letter, written on delicate paper in a delicate hand, and it showed much wear. He read for the thousandth time:

DEAREST JIM—And again I must say "no." Of course you will not understand, for which foolish reason I like you all the better, but you must try to take my point of view. You say that we can be married on nothing and take our chances.

So we can, old simple-heart—but aren't those chances all against us? Would you like to be forced to work in some office for just enough to live on? You know you would not, and you know how you would suffer in such slavery.

Nevertheless we can not live on air, and I doubt if I would stand transplanting to the wild life you love, better than

you to a clerk's desk. You have that fancy which gilds the tin cans in the back yard; I have that unfortunate eye which would multiply their number by three, and their unsightliness by ten. I don't want riches, dear; I only want a modest assurance that I can have enough to live on.

Really, is your way of doing a guarantee of even bread and butter? In the Garden of Eden you would be the most delightful of companions, but in this world as it is, you will not fight for your own. You would risk your life to save a dog, but you couldn't stay at a continued grind—I mean it would kill you, actually, physically, dead, dead—

to save all of us. At first I thought that a fault in you, but now, being older, having compared you to other men, I see it is merely a missing faculty.

I could stick to the desk, and would gladly, if you would let me, yet I could not even fancy behaving as you did at the factory fire, which is still the symbol in the town for manly courage and presence of mind.

They talk now of the way you laughed and joked with those poor frightened girls (who had such good cause to be frightened) and brought them back to sanity with a jest. I feel that if I had the least atom of heroism in me I would marry you for that feat

alone, and let cold facts go hang; but, ah, Jim! magnificent as you are on the grand occasions, they come but seldom, and in the meantime, Jim—I'll leave that to your own honesty.

I'm plebeian, Jim, and you're a nobleman, with a beautiful but embarrassing disregard for vulgar necessities.

However, I can say this for myself—for surely I may brag a little to my lover—I can try to match your splendid physical bravery by my own moral courage.

You may rest your soul in peace on one point. If I am not for you, I'm for no man, no, not so much as a half-

glance of the eye. I wouldn't hold myself a bit more straitly if I were your wife.

You'll be angry at this letter. Well, I'll stand your anger. I have caused it, and I'll bear the blame. I know that we could not be happy without some visible means of support, yet I do not blame you in the least for thinking otherwise.

Be as kind to me as you can, Jim, for I love you very much in my commonplace way. I'll admit, too, that I had rather have your fire than my refrigerator—oh, if you could only make some money—not a great deal, but enough for a little house of our own,

and enough in the bank to buy groceries!

With my best love, and an aching lump in my throat,

Your mother, sister, and sweetheart,

ANNE.

Jim dropped the letter, and his lips trembled a little. Parts of it touched him deeply, and he was the more enraged and hurt at the rest because of that.

He could not call her mercenary. He knew better. More than one very comfortable income was at her disposal.

Poor fellow! He could only grind

his teeth and curse Sweet Briar gulch from the deepest pot-hole in the bed-rock to the top of its loftiest pine. He drew out her photograph, and obtained much sweet consolation by thinking how happy they two would be in Sweet Briar gulch together, even if there wasn't a cent of pay in the gravel.

Sick of this ingenious torture, he lit his pipe and drew savagely upon it. With a mocking gurgle, about a dram of "slumgullion" passed into his mouth. It was the last touch. He spat out the biting, nauseating stuff, hurled the pipe upon the rocks and danced on it.

And yet the colors frolicked in the gulch; the pines toned the air with healthy breath.

From afar came the th-r-r-up! th-r-r-up! th-r-r-up of a galloping horse. It was Bud, the mail-carrier, coming, modestly and quietly, at a decent gait, down a trail where most would prefer to walk, and to "hang on" to something at that.

At first Jim felt irritated by the interruption. He wanted to luxuriate in misery: still he was a vigorous, healthy man, and the cheery good-fellowship of Bud soon made away with that feeling.

"Well, how they coming, Jimmy?"

queried the young giant. "Hit her yet?"

"Hit—well, much caloric,"—replied Jim. "I've begun to believe there ain't a durned thing here."

"You're looking kind of owly, old man—what's up? Don't you feel well?"

"Oh, Bud! I'm sick of everything this day—I don't believe in the constitution of the United States, including the thirteenth amendment, nor the ten commandments, nor the attraction of gravitation, nor anything else—it's all a damned lie."

"No wonder you get like that, mousing around here without a chance to

yappi with a feller critter. 'Nough to make you locoed.

"Jump it for a spell. Go up town. Get loaded. Get horribly loaded. Break somebody's window, and tell the folks you're a Sweet Briar zephyr come to blow out their lights. Go ahead and do it. When your hair stops pulling you'll feel like a new man."

Jim thought the advice sound, yet a strange feeling had developed in him, in his isolation; it was that the eye of Anne was always on him. He had fallen into a habit, which becomes a superstition when a man is alone, of acting as though she were there in person.

However, he didn't feel called upon

to offer Bud that explanation of his refusal. He conveyed the idea in one brief word.

"Busted," said he.

"Busted?" retorted Bud warmly. "Busted? Not much, you ain't busted whilst that little package is there, bet cher life! You call for what you want, and the cashier will make good."

"Ah, Bud! How'll I ever pay you back? Keep it, man, keep it," replied Jim in a disheartened voice.

"Say, you ain't got no call to worry about that part of it—there's where *my* troubles begin," returned Bud. "Now, you take these two bucks and jab 'em in your jeans—Go on, now! Do as I tell

you, or damned if I don't lick you and make you take 'em! What's the good of money if it ain't to help a friend out with? I don't care who gets drunk on it, just so long as they have a good time.

"Boy, you'll be sailing up the track regardless of orders, with your boiler full of suds, if you don't get out in the scramble for a while."

"Lord! I'd like to see a railroad train! Haven't heard a whistle for two years! How far is it to the nearest station, Bud?"

"P l a t t s b u r g—fifty mile—due south."

"Christmas! Little far to walk."

"Say, you take this horse, Jim,—go

ahead! I can walk just as well as not, I'm getting too fat, anyhow. Go on, you take the horse and have a ride to Plattsburg!"

"Yes, take the shirt off your back, and never mind if a bit of the skin goes with it. I'll see you far away first. Tell you what you could do for me, Buddy; the herd of burros is around now, if you'd round up one of them for me?"

"Sure thing! You sit on the mail sack till I come back. There's a heap of registered stuff in it this trip. Oh say! What do you think? I was held up t'other side of the Bulldog. Bang! Zipp! says a little popper from the bushes. I climbed for them bushes, and

out goes a beggar like a rabbit. I was after him like a coyote, bet cher life. Who do you suppose it was, Jim?"

"Hang it, how should I know?"

"That little down-east cuss with the crook in his back. He begged hard. Poor devil, he was up against the sand-paper side, all right. He heard from the postmaster that there was a lot of valuable mail going out, so he thought he'd make a try for it. Then what do you think he had the cold, cold nerve to do?"

"Pass it up—'most anything, I reckon."

"Worse'n that. Struck me for fifty!"

"And got it."

"Got it? No, not much he didn't, sonny! He drew just ten, and he was lucky to get that. I've done a favor or two for that feller, first and last, and to have him shoot at me made me sore —although he missed me by several locations, I'll say that for him—so I gave him the ten and told him I'd kick the hump on his back so high up on his shoulders he could wear it for a hat, if he ever shoved into my daylight again. And you never in your life saw a humpback make better time than he did.

"Well here's for your jack-ass—which way's the herd?"

"Right up over the hill."

Jim sat patiently on the sack until Bud returned with the burro.

"Here's your thoroughbred!" holloed Bud. "Get ap, there, Mary. Look at the knowing ears of him, will you? You bet cher life, you've got an animile there that'll go when he gets ready, and as fast as he pretty well damn pleases—nail him!"

Jim tied a gunny sack on his noble mount, and the two rode on together to the fork in the trail. Jim tried to thank his friend, who knocked his hat over his eyes, and said, "Aw, write it down when you've got more time. Never see a feller in my life I cottoned to more'n you, Jim. First I thought you was too

smooth for my kind of traveling, but later, I see it was only the grain of the wood. I believe in my friends, I do. Here we go hopping around this little world for a small time, and then that's done. S'pose you ain't got any real friends for the trip? Rotten, I say. You go ahead and rip Plattsburg up the back. Wisht I could be there with you. Don't you mind consequences. So long, old man! Hike! You beggar!" The buckskin pony was off with a snort and a splashing of gravel as the irons touched his sides, and Bud vanished down the road without a look behind him.

The next day Jim was in Plattsburg.

One does not know what an alluring quality, what a hazy enchantment can linger around even a small town, until an absence in a real wilderness has given man's work a new flavor.

The people coming and going, the traffic of the stores, the dwellings with small cultivated plots around them warmed Jim like a fire. He had been very lonely, without knowing it. In the afternoon he went down to the depot to see the eastern train come in.

Here again absence played a part, and restored the locomotive to its proper proportions of a miracle.

As the engine glided in, shaking the ground beneath it, it seemed impossible

to Jim that man really made it. What! Bend those mighty rods of steel to his will? Twist and shape those others? Cast those great drivers? And after, to drive the monster with a hand?

He drew back as the buzzing engine passed him, with something like awe. Then the moving village came to a stop and the passengers sallied forth to test their legs, wearied with long sitting.

There was humanity of all shades, from the haughty aristocrat of the Pullman, to the peasant of the immigrant car.

Jim had a sense of pleasure in beholding well-dressed folk again; yet it was merely an æsthetic pleasure, for

he found, when he began to speculate on the possibilities of the throng before him, that he was more interested in those whose all was staked on the trip, than in those to whom it was only an excursion.

People of widely differing nationalities occupied the immigrant car. Jim wondered whether they would ever become Americans, according to his ideas of Americans, a people in which he had great pride and delight; and he shook his head doubtfully as he took them in.

Suddenly a small boy darted out of a car; an exceedingly small boy, thin to emaciation, who made his way through

the crowd with that sprawling, active, dancing manner peculiar to thin small boys and spiders.

Jim half laughed at the little chap until he saw his face; then he realized at a glance that the matter was no laughing one for the boy.

At the same time he saw the shocking thinness of the little face, made into a wolf's face by hunger; the mingled horror and desperation of the eyes; the big man would not have believed a child's face could express emotions of such magnitude. He was wonder-stricken at the sight, and felt an instinctive sympathy for the fugitive.

It is a strange thing how fortune will

sometimes guide with certainty, when reason shows no path.

The boy came unerringly toward Jim; Jim had a sort of prophetic insight that he would. Back behind him the urchin ran. "Don't cher give me away, Mister!" he pleaded. Jim flapped a hand in answer.

At the time he was leaning against a corner of the station; a little back of him was a small lean-to shed where various truck was stored.

Out of the car came a burly brute of a man, who stared about him rapidly.

"Dat's der ol' man," whispered the boy. "If he gits holt of me, there won't be a hull bone left in me body."

The man walked up to the conductor and spoke to him.

"Aggh!" said the boy. "Now dey'll get me sure—der jig is up—dey'll have der hull gang ertop o' me!" the voice trailed off into a strangled sob, and then continued in a fierce whisper: "Aggh! If I had me growth, I'd show 'em! I'd show 'em!" and then a burst of hair-raising profanity.

The argument was growing loud between the man, who was urging something, and the conductor, who was declining; others were walking toward the moderate excitement.

Jim wheeled and caught the boy in his arms. "Up you go!" he said, and

tossed him on top of the shed. "Lie low behind the wood there, and you are all right."

Then came the conductor's voice: "Say, my friend, if you think I'm going to hold my train while you hunt up a lost kid, there's something in you that don't work right! Why didn't you take care of him while you had him? Now you've got just four minutes by the watch; either hustle around and hunt, or drop off the train and hunt—what's that? Now don't you give me any slack, you black-muzzled tarrier, or I'll have the fear of God thrown into you too quick. Get out of here now! Get out of my way!"

The man slouched off, and made a hasty search around the station. A woman's face—scarcely an improvement on the man's—leaned out of the car window and jeered at the hunter, who cursed her back savagely.

The man walked up to Jim. "Say, did yer see a kid go by here, Mister?"

With a shrug of his shoulders, Jim asked him that question in Mr. Ollendorf's French method, about the pink-and-green overcoat of the shoemaker's wife's sister.

The man showered low abuse on what he supposed was a foreigner, until Jim's ribs rose with the desire to kill him.

"Ayr, wot are yer wastin' time wid th' Dago fur?" called the woman. "Th' kid's on the roof!" Jim's heart almost stopped, so thoroughly had he identified himself with this quarrel. He made up his mind to fight for the boy, right or wrong.

But he was saved the trouble. It was only a jest of the woman's, for she suddenly called, so earnestly that even Jim was fooled. "No he ain't neither; I see him! I see him! There he is." It was the perfection of acting, voice and gesture.

The man ran out to see where she was pointing. "Where is he?" he asked, looking wildly around.

"On top der flag-pole, like er monkey! You're it!" she cried, with a shriek of laughter at the black brows of her dupe.

"I'll show yer der joke, when I git in dere!" he threatened.

The woman leaned her chin on her hands and smiled. Jim never forgot the utter undauntedness, impudence and malice of that face. "Yer allus goin' to do sumpin', Pete!" she retorted. "Yer'll be a man yet."

A more amiable man than "Pete" might have been provoked by such conduct. He strode forward with white-knuckled fists and a very unpleasant expression on his face. Several men

started to interfere, but it wasn't necessary.

The woman quietly looked at her bully, chewing a straw with the utmost nonchalance. "Give us a kiss," said she. The man's crest dropped. He said something in an undertone, and got on the car.

Jim needed no further knowledge of this delightful couple to be thoroughly on the boy's side. It seemed to him that the man was quite capable of keeping a small animal at hand, for the fun of torturing it, and as for the woman—well, if there was her like in hell, Jim determined to be good for the rest of his days.

"All aboard!" cried the conductor, and with a few mighty breaths the iron giant whisked its load out in the open again.

"Stay where you are, son, till I see whether that fellow is playing a trick," said Jim, and not until he had looked under the platform, up and down the track, and in the waiting rooms, did he give the command, "Come down!"

II

THE passenger agent saw the performance with astonishment. "So you had the boy tucked away all the time?" said he. "Just what kind of a game is this?"

"Dunno," returned Jim. "Let the boy speak for himself. Now, young man, what's the matter?"

The urchin stood before them, taking them in thoroughly with his sharp little eyes. More big men strolled up.

As a particularly fine foil to the boy's diminutive form, Benny, the baggage smasher, whose overhanging shoulders testified whence came the power that had reduced many a proud Saratoga to elemental conditions, and "Happy Jack," the mammoth, soot-black, loose-jointed negro porter, placed themselves on either side of him. They made the boy look more like an insect than ever.

"Wot's de matter?" he cried in a voice at once hoarse and shrill, with a cursing note in it, and accompanying the words with an extravagant, dramatic gesture of his skinny claw. "I'll tell yer wot's der matter—dey beat me

—dey beat me bad. I don't ast youse to take me word fur it—look at me back—dat's all I ast yer—jes' look at dat!"

He ripped the shirt from his shoulders. An angry growl went up from all those big-bearded men when they saw the horrible stripes and welts—raw, blue and swollen—on the poor little back.

Happy Jack threw up both his gorilla arms. "Lord Jesus! Who done you like dat, boy?" he cried. "'F I got m' hookers on him, cuss me 'f I wudden' put bumps on him bigger'n yer hull body."

"Now yer talkin'," shrieked the boy.

He raised himself to the tips of his toes, bared his teeth to the gum, and with clutching talons, gripping at the air, yelled: "Aggh! If I had me growth! I'd bite his heart out! I'd tear his neck for 'im!"

The men looked astounded on this mighty fury, pent in so small and miserable a cage. The voice had a peculiar alarming call to it, like the note of a fire-gong.

Suddenly the boy's head dropped on the crook of his arm. "Treated me wuss'n a dog," he sobbed out. "Done me so it makes even dat nigger holler when he sees it."

Happy Jack was taken aback. The

other men smoothed down their faces forcibly.

"Say, lil' boy, you think dat's a p'lite way to talk to people?" inquired Jack.

The boy wiped his eyes on his sleeve and went over to him. "Say, don't yer holt nothin' ag'in me fur der word," said he. "Dey've got me looney—dat's wot—yer've used me liker fren'; and if it hoits yer, yer can kick me pants fur me, and I won't say nuthin'."

"Well, there's two-pound-and-a-half of dead game sport for you, all right!" cried Benny. "Good eye, kid!"

Happy Jack smiled a mollified smile eight inches wide. "You is all right, beau," said he. "An' as fur as my bein'

a nigger's concerned, I'll admit my kerplection ain't light." He slapped his ham and brought down a foot on the platform. "Hyah, hyah!" he roared, "you bet dere ain't no dam' blond 'bout me!"

The infectious darky laugh started the others off, and brought matters to a common-sense footing.

The passenger agent took up the interrogation. Was the man the boy's real father? Answer: "How'd I know? Dat's der song he guv me." Were there any relatives? Friends? Answer: "Naw!" Well, what did the boy propose to do? Answer, digging his toes into the boards: "Didn't know—any-

t'ing!" What was his name? "Jim." Jim what? "Didn't know. Sometimes der gun callt himself 'Darragh,' an' sometimes 'Mullen,' an' sometimes 'Smit.' Aggh! He callt himself the foist t'ing dat come to his tongue—he didn't have no real name."

The agent talked to him a bit more, winding up by saying kindly: "You've had a pretty rough time of it, Jimmy, and we'd all like to give you a lift—now, just say what you'd like to do, and maybe we can fix it."

"I'd like to go along wid dat feller, 'f he'll take me," replied the boy, tossing a thumb toward Jim Felton. There was a becoming access of shyness in his

manner; moreover, Felton had an increased interest in him when he knew they bore the same name—a sort of kinship, as it were.

"Well, it's up to you, Mister—" said the passenger agent, with a smile.

"Felton," said Jim. "I'm in. I'll take the boy. Hard rustling down my way, but I guess we can make out somehow. Sure you want to go, kid?"

"Yessir!" very heartily.

"Done, then!"

Happy Jack snatched off his uniform cap, spat on a bill, and flapped it into the bottom thereof.

"Good-by, fren'!" said he. He shook the cap in front of the others. "Here's

fur the lil' rooster; step up to the capen's office an' settle, gents!" he called. "'Member what de Bible says, 'Fool an' his money soon parted.' Come up! Come up!"

They came up generously.

"Stick a five in there for me, Bill," said Benny to the passenger agent. "I'm strapped."

"How much you got, boy?" asked the agent, as Happy counted the money.

"Fo'ty dollars, even money, Misto' Breckenridge." The agent was a bachelor with a fat salary. "Here, that makes it fifty," said he. He turned to Felton. "Now, what do you say if we

go across the street and—er—discuss this matter a little further?"

"Go you," replied Felton.

"Now, Jimmy, you sit here for a moment. We're going on some business."

The boy glanced at them sharply. "Youse fellers is goin' to get a drink," said he.

Those big men put their hands on their sides and roared.

"You'll find that kid worse than a wife, Felton!" said the agent.

"No use of our being hypocrites to the little chap. I reckon he's seen worse things than the inside of a saloon. Come along, laddybuck."

They lined up and partook. The

agent told the story of the waif. "And we started him off with fifty, Mac," he said to the saloon-keeper. "Suppose you break away from some of your ill-gotten gains in the good cause."

The saloon-keeper opened his cash drawer without words and slid over a five-dollar bill. He seemed very glad to part with it.

"Confound it! Now we're upsticks again," said the agent. "Tell you what let's do. Here's ten of us. Each man put up a two, and we'll shake the dice to see who gives it to the kid—winner to set 'em up. That'll make seventy-five—a very respectable figure."

They played a new interesting dice-

game, in which the figure of a pig drawn in chalk upon the bar furnished the "lay-out." It is a game which increases in interest to the last throw. They stuck the saloon-keeper, and were gleeful.

"We ought to name the boy," said Felton, under the inspiration of the second refreshment. "My name's Jim, and I want something else to call him by. I'll make him a present of my last name."

"Gad, that's so!" replied the agent.

"Call him Chescheela Jim," put in a cow-man. "That's Injun for 'little Jim.' 'Ches' ain't a bad nickname."

"Mac, hand over one of those toy

sample bottles of California fizz," said the agent. "We'll put this craft down the ways in shape."

Felton broke the neck off the bottle with a tack-hammer and poured the wine on the boy's head. "I christen thee Chescheela James Felton—may you become a good seaworthy craft, and not fill your skin with this stuff when you grow up," said he dramatically.

The small boy squinted up his eyes to keep the wine out; then he shook the liquid from his hair, looked up and grinned.

"Youse fellers is reg'lar kids," said he.

"Lord, that's a great boy!" said the agent. "He's the oldest man in the crowd. Say, let's give him a white man's start, beginning with a bath."

The whole party went to the barber-shop and made the darky proprietor dispense a bath and a hair-cut for nothing.

"Shave, sir?" asked the latter, when the hair had been properly trimmed.

"No," replied the youth. "I t'ink I'll let me whiskers grow. Dere's enuff wind in dis country ter keep der moths outen 'em."

Then they raided the clothing store, and abused the Hebrew owner until he reduced the price. "Oof der lodt—

everyding, shennelmun! Sigsdy ber zent. Dere's no broffit left—it doaned bay fur the freight."

"Look here, Sol! Will you swear that on a piece of pork?" demanded the agent. The Hebrew moaned.

"Doaned dalk to me!" he cried. "My heardt iss prooken!"

Clean, trimmed and clothed, Chescheela James Felton was a different looking boy. Months only could take those animal lines out of his face, and fresh air and wholesome food fill out the hollows of the cheeks, but, all in all, he was not a bad-looking youngster.

Jim Felton bought some supplies for his camp, and prepared to start for

home that afternoon, as they could yet make fifteen miles before dark.

The new friends of the morning saw them off with hearty good-bys. The boy quite unexpectedly thanked them for their treatment and the money. The poor little soul had heard few words of gratitude, and had less chance to employ them.

His speech was curious, but the generous big men saw behind the words, and felt really touched by the old-child's attempt to express himself.

The two Jims soon pushed on, through the rolling foot-hills near the town, into the broken country. The boy kept watching, watching, but said

little, until at last they came to the stupendous cliffs of Paha-Sahpedon, overhanging the trail with dark majesty. Jim happened to glance at the boy, and saw him looking up, mouth and eyes wide open.

"Say, Mister!" gasped Ches. "Who built them!"

"Built?" repeated Jim, puzzled. Then he understood. "The hand of God, my boy," he replied.

The urchin shivered. "I feel 's if dey was comin' ertop o' me," he gasped. "Let's hook it outer here."

Jim spanked the burro, and they flew out of the Paha-Sahpedon at a canter.

They camped that night in the

spruces of Silver Creek, in one of the prettiest little places that ever lay out of doors. As they prepared the supper and ate it, sharing plate, cup and spoon, the boy was fairly ecstatic.

"Dis is der bulliest ol' time dat ever I had," said he. "I didn't know dere was places like dis 'tall, 'cept Cintral Park. Yer can run aroun' here all yer like, can't yer, Mister? Nobuddy'll stop yer?"

"Not if you ran a thousand miles, Ches. This is the free land, boy. You can do what you like." Jim spoke with warmth, for, although he felt that the child could not understand, yet the love of the country swelled in him so hot

that he could never speak of it carelessly.

"Dat's prutty damn good," responded Ches.

"It is," replied Jim. "Now, Ches, will you do something to oblige me?"

"Sure!"

"Well, then, don't swear. I don't like to hear boys swear."

"I won't cuss another cuss, if I kin help it. Dey'll come out too quick for me sometimes, but I'll try to do dat, now."

"Thank you. Now, let's get the stuff cleared up and roll in."

In the middle of the night Jim heard a strange noise, a puzzling sound he

could not trace. Becoming wider awake, it resolved itself into a stifled weeping.

"Hello there, Ches! What's the matter?" he cried.

The boy flung himself into Jim's arms with a cry. "Ar, I'm scart to deat'," said he. "Take holt uf me, Mister! Take holt uf me! Dere ain't any-t'ing but you and me here 'tall!"

Jim gathered up the trembling figure. "Nothing will hurt you, Ches," he said. "You're safe here."

"I wasn't t'inkin' of gettin' hurted," retorted the boy, with shaky indignation. "Did youse t'ink I'd weaken fur dat? Yer don't know me, den. Dat

ain't bodderin' me—I've been hurted plenty. I'm just scart, dat's wat's der matter."

"Well, now, you cuddle right up in my arms, like a little puppy dog, and you'll feel all right."

"Say, you're prutty good stuff, Mister Felton," whimpered the little voice. "Dis is der bulliest time I ever had, even if I am scart."

"I think you're a brave boy, Ches. Now go to sleep."

A small hand reached timidly around until it found the man's and gave it an affectionate squeeze. "Good night, sir," said Ches.

Jim lay awake, thinking dreamily,

long after the boy's regular breathing showed that he was at peace again. The man felt a tenderness for the waif so abruptly put in his care that only a lonely man can feel. He speculated about the boy's future; he wondered what kind of a man he would make. Surely, with a foundation of such courage, the better part could be brought out.

Then he wondered what Anne would say to the adoption, or rather what advice she would give, for he felt entirely sure of her broad humanity, outside of their one difference. He felt the need of her practical sense. Soon he had drifted into thinking of Anne en-

tirely. Not bitterly now, but with a steady longing. The gray light of the waning moon, sifting through the boughs, was the true lumina for reverie. Why had he not answered her letter? Perhaps by this time—

What was that moving in the grass? He had noticed a sort of something before. He threw up his right hand in a threatening gesture, to frighten the intruder away.

Instantly he got his answer, and an icy wind seemed to ruff his hair—that insistent, dry, shrilling sound that will make a man's blood turn cold if anything will—the whirring defiance of a rattlesnake!

Jim thought quick and hard, with chills and fever coursing over him *ad libitum*. He did not want to waken and frighten the boy. He managed to slip his arm out without disturbing the sleeper. But now! There wasn't a club around except the short sticks of the fire. A two-foot stick is not the proper equipment for rattler hunting, except to those born with nerves so strong that they do not hesitate to catch Mr. Crotalus by the tail and snap his head off.

Jim thought of the rope he had used for a cinch, and made for it with his eye on the snake, lest the latter should approach closer to the boy.

With a deep thankfulness for the heft of the rope, he returned and struck with all the strength of his big body, and pounded away in a sort of crazy rage, although the first stroke had done the business.

He snapped the sweat from his brow as he looked down at the still writhing reptile.

"My God! What might have happened if the boy hadn't waked me?" he thought. The superstition of the miner rose in him rampant. "I believe that kid's going to bring me good luck," he said. "Darned if I don't. Well, I could stand some."

He took up the body of the rattler

on a stick and heaved it far away, then lit his pipe.

"I don't think I care for any more sleep to-night," he laughed. "Like Ches, it ain't that anything will hurt me out here, but I'm everlastingly scared."

He watched the night out, revelling in his enjoyment of the mystery of the coming morning, that phase of the day which never ceases to be unreal, and which calls out of the watcher sentiments and emotions he is a stranger to for the rest of the day.

The sun hung on the sharp point of Old Dog-Tooth like a portent, before he woke the boy.

Ches was all amazement for a second; then he gave a glad cry.

"Gee! Yer still here, ain't yer? No pipe in dis." He looked all around him. "Say! Dis is a reg'lar teeayter uf er place, ain't it?" he remarked. "Dis is der scene where der villun almost gits der gent wid der sword, if der stage mannecher didn't send sumun ter help 'im out."

Jim laughed at the sophisticated infant. "You don't believe in the theater much, then, Ches?"

"Aggh!" replied Ches. "If it ain't seven it's 'leven on der stage—but it's mostly craps in der street."

"Well, son, there are such points on

the dice," admitted Jim. "But let's have something to eat and we'll feel better."

Ches rustled around after sticks in his funny, angularly active style, singing a song the while from the gladness of his heart. It was a merry song, about mother slowly going down the hectic path of phthisis pulmonalis, and sister, who has—one is led to believe—taken to small bottles, small hours and undesirable companions, refusing to come home and lift the mortgage which is shortly to be foreclosed—all in the narrow confines of twenty-five verses.

Jim listened to the inspiriting ditty in astonishment.

"'Bird of the wilderness, blithesome
and cumberless,
Sweet be thy matin o'er moorland and
lea!'"

he quoted. "For Heaven's sake, child," he continued, in some irritation, "where did you learn that echo of the morgue?"

"Don't you like 'er?" asked Ches, in his turn astonished at such a lack of taste. "W'y, dat's er gig in der city—everybuddy an' der ginnies wid der organs is givin' dat out all day long."

"Well, let 'em," commanded Jim. "Don't introduce it to this part of the country. As you render it, through the

nose, and with the wail at the end, it is a thing to make a strong man lie down and give up the ghost in sheer disgust. Ches, does it really make you feel good to sing it?"

"Yessir—kinder," replied Ches hesitatingly.

"Lord!" thought Jim. "What a life, to make a song like that a recreation!" Then aloud: "It's bad luck to sing before breakfast, Ches. I'll teach you a livelier song than that when we hit the trail again."

So it came to pass that during the first miles of their day's journey the way was enlivened by the notes of *The Arkansas Traveler, Garry Owen,*

Where's My Linda-Cinda Gone?, Baltimore Girls, and other songs of a lively character.

Ches approved of these in moderation. Then Jim tried an experiment. With a serious face, but half an eye on the boy, he howled, moaned and grunted *The Cow-boy's Lament,* which still presents the insoluble problem of whether the words or the music are drearier. "OoooooOOO!!! Pla-a-ay your fifes l-o-o-w-l-y, a-a-nd beee-eat your drums sl-o-o-o-wly, and play the dead m-a-arch as you carry me o-o-o-on!" mourned Jim. Ches was all attention. "For I'm o-o-o-nly a p-o-o-o-r cow-boy, and I know I've done w-r-o-

o-o-o-o-ng!" wailed the singer, in conclusion. "How'd you like that, Ches?"

"Say, dat's a ringer!" cried the boy enthusiastically.

Jim sat him down by the roadside and laughed his fill. "I think you're hopeless," he gasped.

The boy was hurt in a way he could not understand. Something pained him—a new sensation, of not being up to the requirements of another's view. His forced acute intelligence made a bull's-eye shot.

"P'r'aps w'en I've got er chist and t'umpers on me like you, I'll like der udder kin' er song," he said.

Jim looked at the pathetic little fig-

ure on the burro, and his conscience smote him. "That's right, boy," he replied very kindly. "I was only joking —ought not to be any ill feeling between friends over a joke, you know. Now, you sing ahead all you plenty please."

"Don't say nuttin' more about it," replied Ches. "It's all square."

A little farther on Jim noticed a piece of quartz outcrop with a metal stain on it. Now, a miner can no more pass such a thing than some others could refuse to pick up the pin shining at their feet, so he took a stone and hammered off a specimen for future reference. In the meantime Ches, on

the burro, got around the turn of the trail.

Suddenly the boy set up a shout of excitement. "Oh, Mister!" he yelled, with a string of profanity, his promise forgotten in his heat. "Come quick, an' look at der cat! Come quick, quick, quick! What a cat! You never see sich a cat!"

Jim dashed forward. "Well, I should say cat!" he remarked, as he took in the situation. On a ledge about fifty feet above the road crouched a full-grown mountain lion, ears back, eyes furtively glimpsing every avenue of escape, yaggering at the intruders savagely.

The small boy in Jim Felton rose on the instant. "Pelt him, Ches! Pelt him!" he cried, and let fly the rock in his hand by way of illustration. A wild animal seems to have little idea of a missile.

The lion held his ground and let the stone strike him in the side. Then, with a screech like the vital principle of forty thousand tom-cat fights—a screech that left a sediment in the ear-drums of the listeners for the balance of the morning—he fairly flew up the straight side of the cliff, followed by a rain of projectiles.

"Ches, we oughtn't to have done that," said Jim soberly. "If that fellow

had been of another mind, he'd have made this the warmest day of our lives."

"W'y! Will dey fight?" asked Ches, his eyes wide open.

"They will that, son, sometimes," replied Jim. Then he launched into the tales of wild beast hunts, drifted from that to the romance of the gold field, the riches coming in a day—the whole glamour of it.

Never did narrator have more attentive listener. There was a sort of white joy in the boy's face.

"Oh, ain't I glad to git in dis!" he cried. "Here's just wot I been lookin' fur." Suddenly he struck Jim on the

shoulder with a tightly clenched fist. "I made fur youse der first t'ing—didn't yer see me? I know me man all right. Der secont I put me peeps on yer I ses ter meself, 'Dat feller won't t'row yer down, Chimmy'—ain't I right, hey? Ain't I right, Mister?"

Jim patted him on the back. "I think you're right, old man," he said. "I'll do anything I can for you."

"Yer don't hafter tell me dat—I know it," replied the boy. A sudden sob gathered in his throat and choked him. "Yer don't know wot I been t'rough, Mister—it 'ud laid out many er big stiff ten times me size. I'd—don't youse laugh at me now, becus I'm only

a kid—I'd give me heart's blood fur youse, s' help me, I would, now!"

"Shake hands, pardner," said Jim, his own voice a trifle hoarse. "We'll do fine together—I know we will."

III

THEY crested the last sharp rise, and looked down upon the little cabin huddling in the spruces—an island of humanity in the beautiful sea of the wilderness.

It seemed to Jim as if the small house brightened in appearance at the return of its soul; his heart in turn rose with a home feeling; his belief in the treasure which lay where the new channel cut across the old wash—that treasure

which would make the world so different—came back to him like a renewed love. His hands ached for a grip on pick and shovel. His strong muscles twitched with eagerness to be at work again.

Suddenly a ponderous and gross sound, out of all proportion to the size of its source, smashed the mountain silence into slivers. It was the burro's greeting to his companions, and the echoes fluttered it from cliff to cliff until it faded into the merest tint.

"Kerissmus! How many of dem is dere?" asked Ches, astonished at the demonstration. At that instant the herd welcomed the returned one.

The cañon was full of brays; colliding, rising, falling and swelling in a tumult of noise against which the dreadful shouting of the gods at the fall of Troy would have seemed as the wail of a kitten.

"Say, I don't like dat!" said Ches. "What's loose?"

Jim had watched the growing astonishment of the boy's face with suppressed emotion, but now he hugged himself and uproariously laughed his laugh out.

"That, Ches," he replied, "is a matter of fifteen or twenty donkeys and an echo—did you think it was the end of the world?"

"I t'ought it was gittin' on well past der middle, all right," retorted Ches. "What 'ud yer expeck of a man dat never heerd der like before?"

"I knew what to expect. I never heard them either till I came out here. I was digging a hole up the side of that hill yonder, and had begun to feel that there was something behind me, and that it was almost time to go home, when old Jack, who has the voice of his family, poured out his soul about twenty rods away. I was half way home, Ches, before I got sand enough to go back and investigate. But now listen, and you'll hear something prettier than that."

He put his fingers to his lips and whistled a bugle call.

"I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up,
I can't get 'em up in the morning,"

sounded Jim. And back came the pretty reveille in a fabric of music, indescribably interwoven; sharp and staccato from the neighboring walls; the lightest of whispers from the distance, turning and twisting upon itself and starting afresh when all seemed still.

"Say, dat *is* prutty!" said Ches enthusiastically. "Hit her again!"

"Young man, you can come up here whenever you feel like it in the future, but as for now, I'm for home and grub."

"Dat ain't so bad, neither. Der animile's jumped me up an' down till I cud hold more'n a man. Dis spook's hang-out business won't quit, will it?"

"No, sir; that's a fixture. Hang on tight now, and I'll race you to the cabin —one, two, three!" and away sprinted Jim down the hill trail, the burro lumbering after.

"No fair! No fair!" yelled Ches. "Yer've got me skate doped! T'row us a tow!"

Jim wheeled at the doorway and

took in the excited, happy little figure bumping on the burro's back. For once in his life he had the satisfaction of an indisputable proof that he had done well. With a sudden access of affection he caught the boy in his arms and stood him on the ground. "Well, here's our home, Ches," he said.

Home! The street Arab filled his puny chest, took a long, devouring look about him, and sought a definition of the word to make sound the lift of pride and hope that rose within him.

"Yer mean nobuddy kin chase us out of dis?"

"Nobody."

"It's our'n!" the boy went on with

curious vehemence. "Like dis here," snatching an old knife from his pocket and shaking it in his tight fist, "ter t'row away, ter sell, er ter keep, and nobuddy got nuttin' ter say about it?"

"Just that, laddybuck. That and nothing else."

"No more slinkin' an' snoopin' aroun' dodgin' der coppers; no more stallin' fer der push; no more dirt of no kind—say, I can't git dat jus' in a minute."

He stood grappling with the new idea. In the search an old one came to the top. His face changed rapidly. The furtive, hunted look returned. In a tone, the odd quiet of which contrast-

ed with the former heat, he spoke again. "Yer for *me,* now, ain't yer, Jim? If—if der Gun should happen ter come here, yer wouldn't t'row me down at dis stage of der game?"

The big man answered him with an equal soberness. He thrust a hand before the boy's eyes—a splendid hand, massive and corded at the base, running out to long, shapely, intelligent fingers, and every line in it spoke of power.

"Do you see that hand, Ches?"

"Yessir."

"If the 'Gun' shows his face where that hand can get a grip on him, it will do the business for him in one squeeze, and if the hand can't reach, there's a

rifle inside that can. Now get that out of your mind once for all."

"Well—" said the boy, "well—aw, I'll be damned, dat's all I kin say, Jim," and rushed into the house.

The miner leaned back and laughed, and blew his nose; and laughed again and blew his nose again; then he wiped the dust out of his eyes, swore a few words himself, and followed the boy within.

The next day Jim started on his work in earnest. Before, he had sunk a hole here or there in the broad smooth surface of the bar of gravel that he felt certain hid his bonanza.

Now, he determined to begin at

the creek bank and drift straight across the bar. That meant six hundred feet of tunnel at the best, unless fortune was much kinder than she had hinted at before—quite an undertaking for one man, considering the timbering and all.

It must have been a miner who wrote, that hope springs eternal in the human breast. Surely in no place other than the mines is the fact so manifest. There was once a man seventy-three years old who was sinking through a cap of cement two hundred feet thick. The stuff was just this side of powder-work, barely to be loosened with a pick. The old man had to climb down sixty feet of ladder, fill his bucket,

climb up again and dump it, and so on and so on and so on. Besides, he had to walk thirty miles and back again with his load, whenever he ran out of provisions. It had taken him a year to put his shaft down the sixty feet. There was one hundred and forty more to go, each foot getting harder, the Lord only knew what would be at the bottom when he got there; yet to sit in that old man's cabin for an hour was to obtain a complete exposition of the theory and practice of optimism. It is an unbelievable story and would be senseless, were it not entirely true.

Beside that effort, Jim's task took on the tint of an avocation, but the man

who runs six hundred feet of tunnel single-handed earns whatever may be at the end of it.

The tunnel was the one thing that Ches abhorred in his new surroundings. Whether it was that it reminded him of the dingy holes of his city life, or whether it was a natural antipathy, Ches was one of those who can never enter a confined space without the sensation of smothering—at any rate, neither argument nor coaxing could get him to put a foot within its dark mouth.

An old miner would have shared his feelings in this instance, for Jim, so thorough in some things, was a careless

workman. Your old miner would have shaken his head at the weak caps and recklessly driven lagging; frames out of plumb and made of any stick that came to hand—more especially as they were to support loose dirt of the most treacherous sort.

Ches worked outside, dumping the car that Jim had made of four tree sections for wheels, and sluice-box boards for sides. Jim, the ingenious, had rigged up a pulley system, whereby Ches could run the car out and in without interrupting the work on the face.

It was hard labor for Ches at first, but he gritted his teeth and stuck it out manfully.

"Bime-by," he would say to himself, "I'll have er muscle on me like Jim, an' den I'll yank dis cussed ol' car right out in der middle of der crik," and he examined the small bunch on his arm critically a dozen times every day.

Meanwhile, his hero and idol was outdoing the human in his exertions. The effort he put forth would have killed an ordinary man. He fought the stubborn earth as though it were an enemy. Stripped to the waist, bent over in the low tunnel, hour after hour Jim plied the pick and shovel with the regularity and power of a machine. There was at once something fascinating and

heroic in the rippling glide of the muscles over his broad back, and in the supple swing that sent the pick to join the packed dirt.

It all looked so easy. It was as if the dirt were very soft, and not the striker very strong. Nevertheless, fourteen hours a day of this, varied occasionally by cutting timbers and carrying them by hand to the tunnel—some of them a weight enough for a horse, others not adequate, "just as they came" being careless Jim's motto—told even on his engines.

They had a certain mark on the cañon side—a wild-cat's hole it was—and when the sun threw the shadow of

the western wall upon the mark, the day's work was finished.

Ches used to watch this with attention. "Yer move along all right till yer gits half way up, den yer jus' crawls, yer ol' beggar!" was his standing remark on the progress of the shadow. Still, he always gave good measurement.

Toward the last of the month Jim grew an interest in their clock.

"Where's the blame thing now, Ches?" would come hollowly out of the tunnel.

"Three more cars away, Jim,—jus' tippin' the white rock."

Then the cheery shout of "All over!"

and the worker stepping out into the fresh air, soft and cool in the twilight, hooking the sweat from his forehead, and wishing that supper would cook itself. Sometimes the wild-cat looked down upon them from his eyrie.

"Ches," said weary Jim, "if that lad thinks at all, he must think we're awful fools."

"He wouldn't be so tur'ble off his guess, neider," replied the equally weary Ches.

After supper, however, the world seemed different. There was Jones's Hill—(a man of large ideas, was Jones, to call that mass of rock a hill)—shining red-hot in the last light against a

topaz or turquoise sky, and the gulch that ran up to it in a mystery of dark green gloom offering up an evening prayer of indescribable odors—those appeals to a life in former spheres which no other sense remembers; the ceaseless roar of the wind in the pines, so steady that it formed a background for other sounds almost as good as silence itself; the evening pipe, and the talk of what had been done and what was to be done—all these made amends.

And then the sleeping—such sleeping! And waking up in the morning in the exact attitude one went to sleep the night before! Sleep that washed out all the former day's fatigue, and started

them as eager as hounds for that of the new day. That is, within limits, for when a man overworks as continually as Jim had done, no paradise sleep nor balsam air can turn him right perpetually.

And for that reason the claim declared a holiday, consisting of a hunting trip. It was a curious hunting trip. Not one "bang!" went the clean and polished rifle. They stalked four deer, crawling on their bellies, quivering with the chase, rounding behind rocks. Then when the game was within range, up went the rifle, Jim squinted along the sights—then dropped it.

"What's der matter?" whispered

Ches. He had been waiting for a long time to hear the gun go off.

"They seem to be having a pretty good time by themselves there, Ches."

"Yes—dat's so—but I've heard deer-meat was good." Ches was disappointed at this manner of hunting.

"So it is," replied Jim, "probably nobody has that notion stronger than the deer." He followed the four pretty animals below them with tense eyes. He loved to hunt but he hated to kill.

"See here, boy," he said, sitting down and pulling off his boots, "I think I can show you some fun—do you notice they're feeding up to that nose of rock? Well I used to be rather quick on my

feet once, and I think if I can slip down behind there without their winding me, if one gets close enough I can catch him with my hands—which is a trick I'd like muchly to accomplish. Now you sit here and watch, and for your life, don't make a move or sound! By Jiminy! if I could do that!" He trotted light-footed down the slope out of sight.

The boy soon saw him reappear behind the sharp rock-wall that jutted out into the valley, rubbing crushed pine-needles upon himself with the idea of overpowering the human odor, although, whether effective in its purpose or not, it was not necessary—a

strong up-wind from deer to man making it impossible that they could scent him.

They waited and they waited, a big man crouched like a tiger below, and a highly excited small boy above, while the deer did every exasperating thing that animals could do.

They started straight for the rock, grazing along, and then for no reason in the world beat back on their tracks, or turned to right or left. They even went so far as to lie down, chewing most contentedly.

One hour went by—two—when suddenly the buck rose and walked straight up the cañon in a course that would

take him within twenty feet of the rock. Jim heard him snort and prepared for action, laying hold of a corner of stone to get a spring from all-fours.

The deer's shadow floated black on the grass before him, and Jim leaped—to the biggest surprise of his life, for instead of making the least effort to escape, the buck charged, and that with such sudden fury it was all the man could do to lay hold of him anywhere as they came to dirt together.

The next ten seconds was delirium, each combatant doing something as quick as he could without any definite aim. Jim received a painful rake across the chest from the antlers, and

a jab in the leg from the sharp hoofs, while the deer was the worse for several bangs over the head and an ear nearly pulled off, as they rolled over together.

It came over Jim with the force of a revelation that he had got into a very different business from that which he had intended. Instead of the "timid deer" whose capture was the difficulty, he found himself engaged with a horned and hoofed demon, and the problem was how to get away.

Meanwhile, Ches had legged it down the hillside at his best speed, enthusiastically cheering what he supposed was a prearranged performance. Jim

had promised him fun, and that whirling heap below supplied plenty of it.

"Hooray!" yelled Ches. "Hooray! Hold him dere, Jim, till I get down!"

Jim heard the shrill voice, as he succeeded, after a desperate effort, in getting an arm around the deer's neck, so that he could do something in the choking line, and he smiled grimly in the heat of battle. "All right, Ches!" he gasped. "Don't—hurry!"

"Keep out of this!" he yelled a moment later as Ches burst out from the bushes. "You'll get killed!"

But Ches was not to be denied. He danced around the pushing, tugging, straining storm-center, and the moment

opportunity offered, slipped in and seized the buck by a hind leg.

If he had touched an electric battery, the effect could not have been more instant. The deer fanned that muscular hind leg, with its boy attachment, at the rate of seven hundred strokes to the minute. Poor Ches' head was nearly snapped off his shoulders, and the breath was literally jerked out of his body, but he hung on, with all the strength that pulling the car had given him.

It was not much help, but it was a diversion. Jim gulped a lungful of air, gathered his powers and came down with all his might. Slowly the

stubborn neck bent—so slowly that Jim feared he would give out before gaining the mastery. As it yielded, his leverage increased, and at last, exerting every ounce of strength that was in him, he downed the foe and held him there, his leg over the front legs whose armament he had felt before, and was not desirous of feeling again.

But the deer gave up the struggle, and lay quiet, looking up with great pleading eyes.

"Yes, you devil!" cried Jim, "you look meek enough now, but if you weren't a handful of hard luck ten seconds ago I never ran across one. You hurt, Ches?"

"I got a lovely t'ump on me smeller, but I'm in it yet—do I let go or don't I?"

"Not on your life—wait a moment!" He worked his weight over on the deer's body. "Now!" he said. "Quick! Jump loose!" Again the deer glanced up reproachfully, as though to say, "How suspicious you are!"

The instant Ches jumped clear, so did Jim. They watched their late antagonist, who sprang to his feet and went off with frisky leaps, apparently as fresh as ever.

Then they looked at each other. Ches was rubbing his stomach with his left hand, while he wiped the blood from

his nose with the right. Jim's coat and trousers were torn; he had a deep scratch across his chest, a gouge in his leg, and he trembled from the exertion.

"Well—Ches!" he panted, "we've—had—a—nice—rest—haven't we?"

"Wouldn't it 'a' been tur'ble if yer hadn't caught him?" replied Ches. And then they simply whooped.

A good incident is an opal among gems in a lonely life. You can turn it over and over and always get new colors.

On the home trip, as Nimrod Jim stalked along with his follower trotting beside, they rehearsed every detail of the unexpected encounter. Jim

crouched and leaped again, giving his sensations when the buck did likewise. Then he waited while Ches ran down a side hill and threw himself upon a sapling, which for the time was a deer's hind leg.

They were just of an age—any one would have said so, on seeing them approach the cabin, arms flying, tongues wagging, bruised, tired and happy.

"Jim," said a very sleepy little boy after supper, gorged like an anaconda, "yer don't see t'ings like dat in N'york —not much yer don't. If dat racket had come off in der Bowery, dere'd be head-lines—'dlines—on der extries—more'n a mile—"

Jim picked him up and tucked him into his bunk. "More'n a mile long—g' nigh'," sighed Ches.

Jim lit his pipe and went out for an evening smoke. It was some little time the next morning before he could realize what he was doing out there under the tree.

He had been in some ways a graver man of late. What he had undertaken as an experiment, a generous impulse, had been turned into a lasting responsibility.

IV

ON the second day after Ches' arrival, Bud had come through with the mail, and before leaving, drew Jim aside, out of the boy's hearing.

"The little feller's yours agin all comers now, Jim," he said.

"What's that?" asked Jim, surprised by the meaning in the tone.

"He's *yours,*" repeated Bud. "That sweet-scented blossom that called himself the boy's dad, filled his skin with

red-eye farther up the line and settled the fuss he had with his dame."

"Hurt her?"

"Man!" said Bud slowly, "he used a knife a foot long—gave it to her a dozen times as hard as he could drive—what's your opinion?"

"Lord Almighty! Did he get away? But no, of course he couldn't, being on the train—"

"He didn't get away. The Con. wired the news to Kimballs. What was he to do when a small army of punchers boarded the train and took the prisoner? He couldn't do nothing, and he never loved that black-muzzled whelp from the time he sassed him in the

depot. The punchers took our friend out and tried him."

"Tried him?"

"With a rope. In three minutes by the watch he was found wanting—your boy now, Jim, as I was telling you. Going to say anything to him about it?"

"Why," said Jim, bewildered, "why, I don't know, Bud—guess not, just yet, on general principles. What do you think?"

"Think you're right," said Bud. "The poor little rooster couldn't help but feel glad to hear the news, but it would sound kind of awful to hear a kid like that say he was glad two people were killed. Better wait till he's

been with you a while, Jim, and learned something different."

Jim flushed at the implied compliment. "You're right, Bud, I will."

"Great little papoose, ain't he?" said Bud, turning in his saddle before his starting rush. "Makings of a man there, all right. The boys in town are dead stuck on him. I'll have to give a complete history when I get back. I must get a gait on, or I'll have Uncle Sammy on my neck again—inspector started out with me this morning."

"The devil he did!" cried Jim indignantly, well knowing the hardships and dangers of the big rider's route.

"Oh, it's all right!" replied Bud with

a wave of his hand. "Come out fine. When the lad first told me he'd been sent out to see why the mails was so late on this line, I told him I'd show him right on the spot, but he said there was no use getting hot about it, as he was only doing his duty, so I quieted down.

"He was a decent sort of feller. I thought to myself before we got under way, 'Now, there won't nothing happen this day—everything'll go as smooth and slick as grease, and this feller will report that I'm sojering,' that's the way it usually works, you know. But this time I played in luck.

"Two miles out of town we ran into a wild-eyed gang from somewhere,

who was going to make us dance. We didn't dance, and I'll say for that inspector that he stood by me like a man, but he was awful sick at his stomach later on from the excitement.

"Next thing, the bridge was down at Squaw Creek, and we swum her. He'd have gone down the flume, if I hadn't got hold of his bridle. 'Nice mail route, this,' says he, as he got ashore. 'Oh, you'd like it,' says I, 'if you got used to it.' I'd begun to wonder what was next myself. Ain't many people swimming Squaw Creek, as you perhaps know.

"Well, next was about ten mile along, just before you come to the old Tin-cup Camp. We was passing the bluff there,

and all of a sudden, rip, thump, biff! Down comes what looked like the whole side a-top of us. It weren't though. It was only a cinnamon had lost his balance, leaning over too far to see what we was. That bear landed right agin brother inspector's horse, and brother inspector's horse tried to climb a tree. Inspector himself fell a-top of the bear. I dassent shoot, for the devil himself couldn't have told which was inspector and which bear. Finally bear shakes himself loose and telescopes himself up the cañon, the worst scared animile in the country. 'If you'll ketch my horse, I'll amble back again,' says the inspector. 'I've in-

vestigated this route pretty thorough, and find it's just as you say. Lamp-posts'll do me all right for a while.' Come out fine, didn't it?

"Whish there! Untie yourself, you yaller bone-heap!" And the mail was a quarter of a mile up the trail.

Jim pondered the information concerning Ches carefully, only to adhere to his original determination. He could not see any way in which the boy would be benefited by hearing the news. Still, the miner hated anything that savored of concealment or deception.

"I wish Anne was here to help me," he thought; "she'd know what to do."

He sat long, looking down, his hands

clasped about his knees, drinking with old Tantalus. But the reverie ended as it always did—in action. There was nothing for it but the claim. Success there meant success everywhere.

It was the knowledge that Anne, the boy, and all he wished to do for both depended on the pay-streak which had urged him to such a fury of effort.

His carelessness of his own life, that led him to slap his timbering up any way, was born of that same fury. And the consequences came like most consequences, without a moment's warning.

It was a still and beautiful noon. Ches had pulled out the last car before dinner, and started for the cabin.

A curious groaning and snapping from the tunnel halted him. It was the giving of the tortured timbers. On the heels of that came a dull, crushing roar. A blast of dust shot from the tunnel-mouth, like smoke from a cannon, preceded by a shock that nearly threw the boy off his feet.

Then all was still again. The sun shone as brilliantly as before, blazing down upon the ghastly face of a little boy, who, after one heart-broken cry of "Jim! Oh, Jim's killed!" sank down upon the ground, chewing the fingers thrust in his mouth, that the pain might make the black wave keep its distance.

For Ches knew that he was alone;

that there was no human being within miles to help the man caught in the hand of that mischance but himself, so frantically willing, but so impotent.

"I must git me wits tergedder—I must!" and down came the teeth with all the strength of the boy's jaw. "Oh, what will I do? What will I do?" The little head waved from side to side in its agony, and a sudden sob struck him in the throat.

After that one small weakness rose Ches Felton, hero. To the mouth of the tunnel he went. Above the tumbled pile of dirt and timber ran a sort of passage, between it and the roof.

A way along which a boy might

crawl and find out if all the frames were down—to which the silence of the tunnel gave a bitter assent—or if by some most lucky chance one or two had held, and Jim be safe within.

Ches climbed to the top and thrust his head into the gloom. "Jim!" he called, "Jim!" No answer.

Before him lay the ruin of his pardner's work. It was over this that his path lay, as deadly dangerous a path as could be found. The slightest disturbing of the roof above might bring down a thousand tons of dirt upon the one who ventured, slowly and hideously to crush his life out, there in the dark, beyond sight and sound of the cheerful

world without. With this knowledge before him, and his inborn fear of the dark hole, as daunting as the hand of death itself, he took his soul in his gripe, and wormed his way within.

Sometimes his back grazed a stone in the roof, and the touch of white-hot iron could not have been so terrible; sometimes a falling stone near him would make his heart leap and stop as he waited for the hill above to follow. Foot by foot he made it, twisting around the end of a post, scooping out the dirt most cautiously where the hole was too small for even his slight body.

Once the sharp end of a broken piece of lagging caught in his clothes, and he

could go neither forward nor back. There, for a second, he broke down. Bracing up again, he managed somehow to get the old knife out of his pocket and cut himself free.

He could see little.

A gray spectral light filtered in here and there that defined nothing, even when his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness.

It was an endless journey. In places where the dirt closed in he would be a full minute progressing a foot, and a minute of such mortal terror as seldom falls to the lot of man of peace or soldier.

But it ended.

Suddenly the boy's outstretched hand encountered only emptiness below. That frame had held. He dove into the space head first, and landed on something soft and warm—the body of his pardner.

He had found him. In a paroxysm of joy, he flung himself upon the motionless figure and cried his heart out. This, too, he soon conquered. Jim had just so much show—any delay might wipe it out. He searched the man's pockets until he found a match. By its light he saw the candle stuck into the post, and lit it. Then he knelt beside his pardner again.

It was a curious picture within that

gloomy chamber underground. The miner lying stark, stretched to his full great length, appearing enormous in the flickering candle-light, and the child, white-faced, big-eyed, but steady as a veteran, wiping the blood from the ragged cut in the man's head.

Ches realized what had happened the instant before the calamity. Jim, startled by the noise of the yielding timbers, had made a rush, only to be struck down by the rock, that now lay within an inch of him; yet struck into safety for all that. Had he gone a yard farther, the life would have been smashed out of him instantly.

But now, what? The flowing blood

sent a sickening chill through the boy. Had he done this much only to be able to see his pardner die? He drove his teeth into his hand again at the thought. What was that? Was it a trick of the tunnel, his heart sounding in his own ears, or a rhythmic beat from outside? Hollow and dull fell that "clatter-clum-clatter-clum."

"Bud!" screamed Ches, "T'ank God, dat's Bud!"

After half a dozen efforts he climbed the dirt pile and went back through the treacherous holes. The rider came so fast! "Oh!" groaned the boy, "I'll never make it! Bud'll t'ink we're off somewheres an' pull on!—*Bud!* BUD!"

he called at the top of his lungs; but the tunnel swallowed the little voice.

Desperation made him entirely reckless. It was any way to get out before the mail-man was beyond call. Glairy with sweat, he pulled, tugged, squirmed and wriggled along, until a dirty, small bundle rolled down almost under the mail-rider's feet.

"Whoa!" shouted Bud with an astonished oath. "What's the—why boy, what's the matter? Damn it! how you scart me!"

One look at him froze the man; he said no more, but waited, watching the working face of the child, who was

mastering himself once more, in order to tell a quick, straight story, that no time might be lost.

"Der tunnel's fell in, Bud; Jim's in dere where der frame's held. He's livin' yet, but he's got a tur'ble cut in his head."

The mail-rider drew out paper and tobacco, and rolled a cigarette. It was his method of biting his hand. He loved the man inside that dark blotch on the hill-side with an affection only known where men are few and strong. And because he loved him, Bud was going to keep his head cool and clear, to find the right thing to do and do it the right way.

For all his calm outer man the mind within was whirling. He turned to the tense little face before him for help, and with an admiration that knew no bounds.

"How far back?" he asked.

"T'ree frames was held—dere was seven, ten foot apart—how much is dat?"

"Forty feet—ten foot apart! No wonder! Oh, Jim! How could you have been so careless?"

The boy's shoulders shook once. "He worked like er horse—now it's all gone an' he's in dere—" The face was contorted out of all humanity, but he held the tears back.

Bud leaped from his horse. "Never you mind, Chessy lad!" he cried, hugging up the little figure, "we'll get him out of that, by God!—Could we haul him out the way you went?"

"No, dere ain't room—an' if you touch dat roof hard—" he shuddered.

Bud sucked in his breath. "If you weren't the sandy little man to try it!" he said. He stood a moment in silence going over it all.

"Ches," he said, "there ain't any time to lose. If Jim's cut like that he may bleed to death in there when we could save him all right if we had him outside.

"There's a party of miners down the

road eight mile. They was having their grub as I went by. Chances are they'll be there yet. They've got four men and a team. I *could* ride back, but I ought to be here working. Do you think you could stick on old Buck and ride there?"

"I kin."

"By God! I hate to do it—but there ain't any other way!" The big man ground his teeth together. "I hate to do it—damned if I'll do it!"

Ches caught his hand. "I kin make it, Bud," he pleaded; "I cuddent do nothin' if I stayed here, an' you could do a heap. Put me up and let me try."

"All right," said Bud. "The good

Lord kept you from getting hurt in the tunnel, perhaps He'll see you through again. Shut your eyes and hold on tight when you strike the high places, and don't touch a rein—leave it all to old Buck."

He stepped forward and caught the horse by the bit.

"Buck!" he said, as though talking to a human being, "you and me have been through a heap together—don't fall down on me, now!—Take the kid safe, old boy!" He caught Ches up and threw him across the saddle. "You'll only have to tell 'em what's happened—the Lord send nothing happens to you! Good-by, you brave

little devil—we'll win out yet. Go it, Buck!"

And while one of Jim's friends plied pick and shovel like a mad man, the other was swaying on top of a galloping horse, gripping the pommel of the saddle with all the strength he had, and shutting his eyes when he came to the high places.

Captain Hanrahan's party were miners of substance. They were working their way out to a new country to suit their inclinations. It had just been suggested that it was perhaps time to hit the trail again when the captain saw a figure on a horse flying athwart the mountain side—the regular road was

bad enough, but Bud had short cuts of his own, and Buck followed his usual way.

"Huh!" said the captain, "that man's drunk or crazy?"

"Holy sufferin'!" gasped the man next him, as the yellow horse slipped on a turn and sent a shower of gravel a thousand feet below. "That was a near touch," as the horse caught himself and swept on.

"Looks to me like a case of trouble, Cap," said a third speaker. "That ain't no man, anyhow—it's only a boy."

"Horse running away with him, probably—his folks ought to be clubbed for letting him out on such an

animal. Well, spread out, boys, and we'll catch him."

But Buck stopped in two jumps, at Ches' command of "Whoa!"

"Fren's!" cried the boy, "me pardner's caught in a tunnel dat caved in on him. Kin yer help us out? Three mile above Jones's Hill."

He had not finished the sentence before two men sprang for the horses. The rest grabbed picks and shovels and hurled them into the wagon.

"We'll be there, hell-a-whooping," said Captain Hanrahan.

"T'anks!" replied Ches weakly, and then the world went out. The captain caught him as he fell.

"Poor little cuss! He rid hard to help his pardner!" said the captain. "Hump yourselves, boys—all ready! Got the whisky, Pete? Picks enough? Stick the axes where they won't jump loose and cut a leg off some of us. Tie the horse behind—good animal, that. All right, let 'em go!"

They went. Over stones and gulleys, the tools clanging and banging fit to leap from the wagon, the men clinging to the side-boards for dear life.

Down hill-sides like the slant of a roof, the horses keeping out of the way of the wagon; up the other side with the reeking animals straining every fiber; over bridges that bent fearfully

beneath the shock of their onset; swaying around curves with the wheels sluing and sparks flying, and over the level as though the devil himself were behind them.

It was the record trip for eight miles in a wagon in that country. The driver stood up, a foot braced on either side, the reins thrown loose, the whip plied hard, and every urging that voice could give shrieked out by his powerful lungs.

It was like the rush of a fire-engine, plus twice the speed, and twenty times the danger. Above the pounding of hoofs, the din of rattling metal, the crash, smash and roar of the wheels

and the yells of the driver could be heard the man Pete, ex-cowpuncher, cheerfully singing,

"Roll your tails, and roll 'em high,
We'll all be angels by-and-by."

Braced in the back corner sat Captain Hanrahan, his leg keeping some of the tools from going overboard, holding Ches in his arms.

"Curse it all, Billy!" he screamed to the driver, "miss *some* of them bumps, will you? I've got on a new pair of pants."

"I'll take 'em clean off you the next time, Cap!" retorted the driver.

They joked, which may seem heartless; but they risked their necks a hundred times, and that isn't very heartless.

"That's the place, I reckon, Cap!" said the driver, pointing. "Somebody working there now!"

"Give 'em a hoot!" replied the captain.

Bud stepped out and held up his hand in answer to the yell. The wave of thanksgiving at the sight of this most efficient help took all the stiffness out of the knees of the mail-rider. The tears rolled down his face unnoticed.

"You're welcome, boys," he cried, as the driver sawed the frenzied team

to a standstill and the men sprang out.

"Reckon we are," said the captain. "Now what's up?"

"Is the boy hurt? Good God! He ain't hurt himself, has he?"

"Naw; pore little cuss is used up, that's all. He'll be around all right in a minute. Now tell me, what's loose."

Bud answered briefly, but completely.

"Pete and Billy, get to cutting wood —the rest of you come here," commanded the captain.

"You ain't going to stop to timber, are you?" asked Bud in an agony of haste.

"I sure am," replied the captain.

"All this trouble's come of carelessness. Now you just keep your clothes on, and let me run this thing.

"We'll have your friend out in no time, and there won't be no more men stuck in there with a hill a-top of 'em in the doing of it. What you've done there is a help all right, but it might easy have meant that we'd had two men instead of one to hunt for."

"You're dead right," said Bud. "Tell me what I'm to do."

The captain took hold as only a man can who has the genius for it. He knew by long practice what size of a relief tunnel meant real speed of progress—the least dirt to be removed to make it

possible that men could work to advantage. And his tunnel, safely rough-ceiled, went in at the rate of a foot a minute.

When at last they pulled the insensible man out into the light of day, and found that while his wound, though severe, and if neglected mortal, was not likely to be dangerous with good attention, the captain said that he must be getting about his business.

"Oh, stay a little longer, fellers, till he comes to," remonstrated Bud. "He'd like to have a chance to say 'Thank you.'"

"Bugs!" replied the captain. "You tell him he owes us a drink, and as a

particular favor to me, please not to put his frames over four foot apart in that ground.

"We're likely to be back here shortly, anyhow, because I think your friend has got hold of the right idea from what you tell me of his plans; but it'll take more'n one man to really prospect it. If we don't hit it where we're going, we'll sure come back."

"Well, boys, *I* can thank you and I'm going to," said Bud. "That man is my friend, and if you hadn't come as you did—"

"Say, let go," interrupted the captain. "You'd have done the same thing if you'd been us, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," admitted Bud reluctantly.

"And you wouldn't want to be thanked for it a white chip more'n we do," concluded the captain. "If there's any thanks coming it is to that little two-foot chunk of man yonder. Snaking over that fall was a thing to put a crimp in anybody. You was bound to help your pardner, wasn't you, son?"

The boy looked up into the captain's eagle face. "I'd 'er got to Jim," he answered simply, "'f I'd had ter chew me way in like a rat."

The captain stepped back and looked at him.

"By the Lord!" he said slowly, "I believe you would!" A change came over

the thin, arrogant face. He stooped suddenly, raised the boy and kissed him. "Now, get out o' this!" he roared at the driver, as he leaped into the wagon.

They waved their hands as long as the miners were in sight, and stood staring until Pete's statement that they'd all be angels by-and-by was lost in the distance.

"Pretty good folks when you're in trouble, ain't they, Ches?" said Bud.

"What 'ud we have done, if dey hadn't come?—Ain't it 'mos' time Jim was moving, Bud?"

"I'll give him another spoonful of whisky, but you can't expect him to

start right up and hop around. He got an awful crack, boy."

For all that, as the dose of strong liquor went down Jim's throat, he opened his eyes.

"Hello, Bud! Hello, Ches!" he said wonderingly. "Have I been asleep?—Why, what the devil's the matter with my head?" he raised his hand to the spruce-gum bandage. "Phew! But I feel weak!" he sighed as his hand dropped. "Something's happened—what is it?"

There, with a friend on each side holding a hand, they told him the story. It was a sacred reunion.

The gratitude of the man saved, and

the protestations of the others that they would have done all they did a thousand times again would only seem childish in repetition. They cried, too, which is excusable in a child, but not in two big men. Men don't cry. It is the monopoly of women. Nevertheless, Bud and Jim and Ches cried and swore, and shook hands and cried again until it was a pitiful thing to see.

"Well," said Bud at last, "this makes you feel better, but it won't get the work done. I've got to go out and fix old Buck and get in some firewood."

"Oh, I'll do that!" cried Jim, raising himself on his elbow.

"You?" jeered Bud. "You look like it! Now, you lie right down there and get well—that's your play. It would make us feel as if we'd wasted our time if we had to turn to and bury you after all the trouble we've had. You're good for two weeks in that bunk, old horse."

"Two weeks! I can't, Bud; I can't! I must get up before that!"

"You lie down there—hear me?"

"But I'll have to see to things around —you can't stay."

"I stay right here till you're well."

"But the mail?"

"The devil take the mail—or anybody else that wants the job. Uncle Sammy won't hop on to my collar but-

ton, because of the fine send-off my friend the inspector'll give. And somebody will get orry-eyed up in town, and come down to find what's loose. He'll take the bags then. It's all settled."

"But there are other things—"

"Let 'em rest. Now I'm off to do the chores—oh, say, speaking of mail, here's a letter for you I forgot all about in the excitement—here you go. Come along, Ches, and help me carry wood."

The miner looked at the letter in his hand, and a tinge of blood crept into his white cheeks, then ebbed, leaving them whiter than before.

Suppose there were other men who wanted her; men with money, learn-

ing, wit and influence. Was this bitterest of blows to fall upon him when he was already down? He looked at his hands, green from loss of blood. "I tried," he muttered, "I tried."

Still the very touch of the paper seemed to have something warm and heartening in it. It was from *her,* anyhow. With sudden strength he tore it open and read:

DEAREST, DEAREST JIM—I yield the whole case. You are right.

It is to my shame that clear-sightedness came from no source within me, but from a brave example set.

My little cousin married the man

she loved last week, and, of course, Miss Anne was a high functionary.

Oh, what a stirring there was in me, Jim, watching them and thinking of you!

They will be as poor as church mice, but they do not care, and theirs is the wise economy.

Life is too short to waste, Jim, I see it now. I put it all in your hands, dearest; if you can not come to me, I shall come to you.

I believe I'm only lukewarm by habit, not by nature.

I wish I could tell you how sorry I am for the time I have squandered.

I'll show you, that will be better.

Any time, or any place and no conditions now, Jim. That's all, my dear brave lover. Good night.

Your own, ANNE.

He was sitting bolt upright. Once more he devoured the letter. Then he sank back and closed his eyes.

"Thank you, my darling, I can rest now," he said.

The golden sunset light played in riotous joyousness on the cabin walls; the little creek laughed out loud; so did Ches and Bud, approaching the cabin. It was a beautiful and happy world.

THE END